

EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS: YOUR INTERNAL PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

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If your organization regularly communicates with employees, then you understand the value of keeping employees informed about changes and plans for the organization. If you don't have a program for regular employee communications, there are compelling reasons to start one.

External Media Relations

Organizations across the country spend large amounts of money, engage outside consultants and employ staff to help ensure that the organization's message reaches its external audiences. Most successful business people know that it is smart to maintain a public relations program. Strategic campaigns can boost sales, attract investors, draw talent and change minds.

At times, while paying close attention to external media relations, many companies overlook one very important audience – their own employees.

An Organization's Most Important Public

A recent Internet search on the term "employee engagement" revealed more than two million results. "Employee communications" resulted in nearly a million hits. Certainly, not all results are on target, but the point is that these topics generate a great deal of interest.

Your most important public is your workforce. Everyday you have the potential to send dozens, hundreds, or thousands of brand ambassadors into the marketplace. On the flip side, you can send a similarly-sized army of discontented workers who undermine your efforts to achieve success by spreading their discontent beyond the office.

An easy and cost-effective way to build an army of “brand ambassadors” is to inform employees about what you’re doing and why. It’s really often that simple.

Employees want to be valued and to have a stake in the organization where they spend so much time. People take pride in their work. At a cocktail party, what’s the first thing most people ask each other? “What do you do?” That question usually leads to a conversation about the speakers’ companies and what is happening at them. Hopefully, your employee is a brand ambassador, proudly proclaiming where he works and what he does. If you are communicating regularly, there’s less chance the ambassador will turn into an enemy weakening your organization’s foundation and reputation.

Organizations that don’t communicate clearly with employees run the risk of letting the workforce speculate as to what is happening. This can lead to employees who are suspicious of management, do not feel valued, and lack motivation to put forth extra effort because they believe they have no stake in the organization.

Organizations that communicate have employees who support management, believe they are valued, and work harder because they know they contribute directly to the organization’s success.

Here are some of the most common, and best, methods of communicating.

You Could Try Talking

There are some simple steps that you can take that will go far in improving morale and building your army of brand ambassadors.

You can start simply by talking to your employees. Strife and stress often arise from a lack of knowledge. Almost everyone at some point has said to a family member or friend, “Just talk to me,” in an effort to alleviate an issue.

Some organizations have implemented a “town hall” style of meeting. Different management team members can take turns leading the meetings. Staff members can get their opportunities to address the group. Everyone learns more about other departments and people they might not normally interact with in the course of their workday.

Meetings should become a regular routine and should not be used only to deliver bad news.

An Intranet

If you have not set up an Intranet, this is a nice way to quickly disseminate information to everyone across an organization. Intranets allow employees to access information, forms, and resources meant to help them do their jobs. Newsletters can be posted to an Intranet. Make it easy for the employees to get the information.

A Newsletter

Newsletters can be very effective if they provide the information that employees want. Some components of a good newsletter can include: letter from the president, sections to highlight employee accomplishments, sections dedicated to departments or regions, and lots of pictures.

Stay focused on the organization and its people. Share information about plans, successes, and even failures. An old-fashioned “suggestion box” section can also be included where employee questions are answered for everyone.

Nowadays, you can make your newsletter electronic and post it on your Intranet. That doesn’t mean you can’t have a printed version if much of your workforce wants a newsletter they can hold and take home. Do what fits the organization’s culture.

Cautions

Regular and open communications with employees helps set a company apart from its competition because you are fostering a happy work environment. You will empower employees to tout your brand and want to stay with your organization.

There are some notes of caution. To protect trade secrets, you should make sure employees have signed nondisclosure agreements and that legal counsel has drafted the document for you.

Anything you say to employees or put in writing has the potential to be shared with people outside the organization. So, be careful with proprietary information. If you own a private company, you might want to use only broad strokes when discussing financial issues.

Summary

Engaged employees prefer to work for transparent companies and leaders. These workers want to know what their organization is doing, why it's doing it, and how their role helps achieve any goals. Simply by communicating honestly with employees you demonstrate that you trust them. Then, your brand ambassadors are at least as valuable as the PR firm you have on retainer.

Keeping in mind your organization's culture and people, determine which communications methods work best. Likely it's a mix. No matter what you decide, be honest, be sensitive, be consistent, and be yourself.

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